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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000326

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [MR](#)  
SUBJECT: AFRO-MAURITANIAN TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT; CLAIMS  
CENSUS DISCRIMINATION

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

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(C) Key Points  
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-- Afro-Mauritanian political party president Ba Alassane told Ambassador March 20 that he would run for president.

-- Alassane said he would make uniting the Moors and Afro-Mauritanians his "central issue" because "the problem of cohabitation...is the largest problem facing Mauritania...and no White Moor candidate would take up the issue...for fear that they would lose support from their White Moor base."

-- Alassane said that while Afro-Mauritanians with National ID cards were being registered, those without IDs were being discriminated against and prevented from registering.

-- Alassane said that Afro-Mauritanians will vote against the Constitutional Referendum scheduled for June 24 because they want the Constitution to say that Mauritaniens are not just Arabs, but various black Africans as well.

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(C) Comments  
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-- Alassane will not be a strong presidential candidate, according to political handicappers here. His party is weak, and Alassane has only limited support in pockets of the south.

-- Ambassador is meeting with the National Election Commission today, the 23rd, and will take up Alassane's claim that Afro-Mauritanians are being discriminated against in the census and voter registration campaign underway.

-- Even if Afro-Mauritanians were to vote en masse against the referendum, the referendum on several changes to the constitution is still likely to pass. The changes are centered on establishing term limits for the presidency: a maximum of two terms, five years each.

End Key Points and Comments.

1. (U) In a meeting with Ambassador March 20, political party president Ba Alassane discussed Afro-Mauritanian concerns regarding the census and coming elections. Alassane's party, the Party for Liberty, Equality and Justice (PLEJ) is one of only three recognized Afro-Mauritanian political parties and is a member of the sole Afro-Mauritanian political party coalition, Bloc for Change.

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WHO CAN UNITE THE MOORS AND AFRO-MAURITANIANS?  
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2. (C) In response to Ambassador's question of who could unite the racially divided country and garner broad popular support, Alassane said "I don't see any current candidate able or willing to bring these two groups together," adding that "this is why I want to tell you today that I have decided to announce my candidacy for president." Alassane said he would make the issue of uniting the Moors and Afro-Mauritanians his "central issue" because the problem of cohabitation between these two groups is the largest problem facing Mauritania today.

3. (C) Alassane said that no White Moor candidate would take

up the issue of cohabitation ou of fear that they would lose support from their hite Moor base. Using the popular candidate Ahmd Ould Daddah as an example, Alassane said "he hs promised to address the problem of cohabitation fter he becomes President, but has said he won'tmake the issue part of his platform." Alassane said Daddah would never address cohabitation once he became president, and "the Afro-Mauritanians know it," adding that "this is why Afro-Mauritanians will only vote for Afro-Mauritanian candidates who they know will support them...like me." "Afro-Mauritanians are tired of being ignored," he concluded.

NOUAKCHOTT 00000326 002 OF 002

14. (C) When asked if he would be the presidential candidate for the Bloc for Change Alassane said "I don't know because that decision has not yet been made," adding that "I plan to run either way, with or without them." In response to PolOff's question if he would "possibly run against a Bloc for Change candidate," he replied "if necessary."

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DISCRIMINATION IN THE CENSUS  
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15. (C) Alassane said that, while Afro-Mauritanians with National ID cards are being registered, "many other Afro-Mauritanians lack IDs and haven't been able to get new ones in order to register to vote." According to Alassane, the government promised to use mobile National ID card issuance teams to provide IDs to residents in rural areas who were not able to travel to the fixed application centers located in main towns. "The government has not done this, and as a result, as many as 50 percent of citizens in many Afro-Mauritanian villages don't have their IDs and can't register," Alassane said.

16. (C) Alassane spoke about "the flawed" process for applying for an ID card for citizens who lack the required documentation. Theoretically, "if you don't have the needed papers you can bring two witnesses to your local prefect (central government representative) to verify your citizenship and be given your ID card," he said, noting that "the prefect can then either accept these witnesses and the applicants' claim of citizenship, or reject the witnesses and send the case to the police to investigate." A referral for investigation means that the case will stay in suspense almost indefinitely. According to Alassane, "prefects are denying a significant number of witnesses for Afro-Mauritanian applicants because of political and racist motivations." Alassane said that in Pular villages no one has been given ID cards through this method. He also alleged that it was possible in some areas to pay a bribe to the prefect to receive an ID card. He also charged that many mayors decide whether or not to serve as a witness based on political motivations, rather than performing their civic duty for all their constituents. When a mayor declines to serve as witness, the prefect often refers the matter of citizenship to the police for an investigation of the citizenship claim. But the police fail, or are very slow, to act.

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AFRO-MAURITANIANS COULD SPEAK OUT AGAINST THE ELECTIONS  
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17. (C) In response to Ambassador's question "as a presidential candidate will you announce that the voting on the referendum and later votes will be fraudulent because of these registration problems" Alassane said "I am hopeful that these problems will be solved in the next few weeks and that that will not be necessary. However, if the problems are not solved, all Afro-Mauritanian parties will reject the voter lists and consider these elections fraudulent." "And if the UN, after its audit, says the voter lists are sufficiently accurate, will that affect your decision," the Ambassador asked, eliciting from Alassane "the UN will say what they say, but if we feel that the voter lists and elections are fraudulent, we will say so. It doesn't matter what the UN audit says."

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AFRO-MAURITANIANS TO VOTE AGAINST THE REFERENDUM  
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18. (C) Alassane said that many Afro-Mauritanians will vote against the Constitutional Referendum scheduled for June 24. "The Constitution should identify all Mauritians, including the Pular, Wolof, and Soninke," Alassane said, adding "it isn't sufficient to say that it is the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and leave people believing that there are only Arabs." He went on to say that "this omission only promotes the problems of national identity that have led to the cohabitation problems we've already discussed."

LeBaron